STUDIES OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS BY JAPANESE SCHOLARS

By Mamoru Iga

This paper presents a brief quantitative summary of the types of social problems recently studied by Japanese sociologists followed by a discussion of methods of study and attitudes of sociologists toward social problems. In Japan the scientific study of social problems is conducted principally by sociologists. The single noteworthy exception is psychological research on problems of mental health, which is not considered here. Most of the information presented in this paper on kinds of social problems studied was compiled from an examination of the contents of the two leading Japanese journals of sociology for the years 1962 and 1965, which included two comprehensive bibliographies of Japanese sociological publications for the years 1961 and 1963. I regret that more specialized journals such as *Kyoiku Shakaigaku Kenkyu* (Studies of Educational Sociology), *Shakai Shinri Kenkyu Nempo* (The Annual Report in Social Psychology), and *Seiji Shakaigaku Nempo* (The Annual Report in Political Sociology) are not available to me at present. According to my personal communication with Professor Koichiro Kobayashi, empirical studies of social problems are more likely to appear in such journals.

The Scope of Japanese Studies of Social Problems

During the years 1962 and 1965, 92 articles appeared in the sociological journals *Nihon Shakaigaku Hyoron* (Japanese Sociological Review) and *Soshioloji*, of which 12 concerned specific social problems. Bibliographies of Japanese sociological publications for the years 1961 and 1963 appearing in *Nihon Shakaigaku Hyoron* list 1,202 works, of which 76 concerned specific social problems and 23 were more generalized treatments of social problems and social welfare. Principal subjects of the writings on specific social problems, as presented in detail in Tables I-III, were crime and delinquency (36.3%), poverty (16.0%), and family welfare problems (11.3%). In comparison with American scholars, as represented in the 1962 and 1965 issues of the *American Sociological Review* and the 1963 and 1965 issues of the *Journal of Social Problems*, Japanese sociologists have greater concern with suicide (5.6% vs 0%), gerontological problems (5.7% vs. 0%), and

poverty (16.0% vs. 8.9%), and are less interested in crime and delinquency 36.3% vs. 50.0%) and minority group problems (8.0% vs. 12.5%). Interest in problems of the outcaste minority of Japan is confined principally to staff and students of Ryuukoku University, an institution connected with the Shin Buddhist sect, the sect to which most members of the outcaste groups belong.[1] In general, Japanese sociologists are not concerned with minority problems.

Differences in Subjects of Interest, Theoretical Orientations, and Methodology of Japanese and American Sociologists Studying Social Problems

Japanese sociologists are much less interested than their American counterparts in the empirical study of social problems, as is evidenced by the following facts: 1) No scientific journals exist in Japan comparable with American journals oriented toward social problems, such as *Journal of Social Problems, The Journal of Social Issues, The Journal of Conflict Resolution,* and *Phylon.* 2) In 1962 and 1965 only 13% of the articles in the *Japanese Sociological Review* and *Soshioloji* dealt with social problems, as compared with 37% in the *American Sociological Review* (Table III). 3) Few Japanese colleges and universities offer courses on social problems. According to the June 1962 issue of *Soshioloji,* five colleges and universities in the Kyoto-Osaka area offered in that year 155 sociology courses, of which only one was specifically oriented toward social problems (Table IV). The comparable figures for 1967 were 118 and 3, respectively. Two of the three problem-oriented courses were entitled *shakai mondai* (social problems) and one *shakai byori* (social pathology). In the latter course, specific social problems are not treated; the major subject is social stratification, treated on theoretical or ideological levels. In 1968, Kyoto and Osaka Universities offered 53 sociology courses, of which only one was on social problems (Table IV).

The difference between Japanese and American sociologists in the degree and nature of interest in social problems is illustrated by Professor Ishikawa's report on a summer seminar with Professor Robert Merton in Kyoto in 1967. Merton could not understand why the outcastes, who are physically indistinguishable from other Japanese, could be the subjects of discrimination even when they moved to a new city environment with a high mobility rate, and why Japanese sociologists gave so little attention to this obvious social problem. Merton also asked Japanese colleagues what proportion of the female labor force in Japan was employed in welfare projects planned to provide employment. Ishikawa (1967) reflected that "Our inability to answer these questions seems to have been something shameful in Professor Merton's mind, although he apparently does not consider it a problem that American sociologists are in close cooperation with governmental policies."

Methodologically, three characteristics seem to be particularly marked in the Japanese studies. 1) Despite acquaintance with theory on a wide range of subjects, Japanese sociologists do not often integrate it with empirical research. This tendency has been criticized by Fukutake (1965), Iwai (1965), Mita (1965), and others, but the actual situation is not changing. 2) Most empirical studies of social problems by Japanese sociologists are ecological-demographic and ethnographic descriptions of individual communities (Seki 1963). Very few studies test hypotheses. 3) Interdisciplinary studies are few even on the subjects in which American scholars show an increasing degree of interdisciplinary cooperation, for example, gerontology and mental disorders (Takenaka 1963).

Two characteristics seem to be eminent in the basic frame of reference underlying the studies of Japanese scholars of social problems: 1) individual deviance is generally dealt with even in some psychiatric approaches as social maladaptation rather than as internal maladjustment or insufficient psycho-social development of the individual; and 2) problems arising from normative dissensus (e.g., ethnic and family problems) and problems arising from work and poverty are discussed from an ideological rather than experiential point of view. Two basic values, present versus future and collectivity versus self, that underlie Japanese social problems are evident in these scholarly trends. For example, the emphasis on social maladaptation over internal maladjustment or on inadequate psychological development of the individual is exemplified by the psychotherapeutic technique called *naikan* ("concentrated self reflection" or, literally, "looking within"), which the psychologist Katashi Takeuchi (1965: 2) calls a "miracle of our time" and "a well established scientific method of psychotherapy." The theory underlying *naikan* is that delinquency and crime are products of a patient's "misunderstanding" his parents. When correct understanding is attained the patient's attitude toward his parents and the entire world changes; he becomes aware of "the greatness of his debts to his parents." When Takeuchi maintains that the "discontents or grievances due to dissatisfaction of the egocentric small desires will prevent man's real progress and innovation, and will force him to destruction instead," the meaning he gives to progress and innovation is "to discard egocentric dissatisfaction, to adjust to social norms, and to serve the existing society." In contrast with Zen, which begins with *daigidan* (great doubts), *naikan* advises people to return to tradition, to perform their roles without doubt. Its aim is "to produce conformance through reformation" (Kitsuse 1965b: 11). This is not a contradiction to traditionally minded Japanese.

Problems arising from normative dissensus and associated with work and poverty are generally studied from points of view either favoring or disfavoring governmental welfare policies. These studies are seldom supported by empirical verification of assumptions or by social psycholog-

ical analyses of the individual. The four-volume publication *Gendai Nippon no Shakai Mondai* (Social Problems in Contemporary Japan by Manabe et al 1966-67) includes about 25 articles by young Japanese sociologists which criticize Japanese social structure and, exceptionally, give many factual data to support the criticisms. The topics are problems associated with poverty—low wages, unemployment, marginal business enterprises, female labor, and family disorganization—and prejudice against outcastes, Koreans, Okinawans, and atomic bomb victims in Hiroshima. All articles view poverty and discrimination as products of capitalism under the emperor institution and American imperialism, and contend that the present prosperity in Japan has been attained only by the exploitation and sacrifice of disadvantaged groups.

A number of traits of Japanese culture correlate with the lack of scholarly concern with the psycho-social development of the individual: 1) The orientation toward adaptation to the present is related to the lack of a philosophy with abstract ideals, such as humanism, that asserts the dignity and worth of man and his capacity for self-realization through reason. Traditional Japanese values relate to a "limited social nexus" (Nakamura 1964: Ch. 35). Little emphasis is placed upon the individual's right to welfare and upon his personal development of objective, analytic, and critical faculties. Accordingly, certain social phenomena regarded as problems by American social scientists may not be so regarded by their Japanese counterparts. 2) A correlate of the lack of abstract ideals is opportunism. Many young Japanese who are revolutionists at college become traditionalists when they obtain a respectable position at graduation (Denman 1968: 43; Ishizaka 1968: 1967). Taizo Ishizaka (loc. cit.), a prominent businessman, calls revolutionary Japanese students "apple red" because they are red only on the surface. 3) Orientation toward the present is also seen in typical Japanese responses to actual or imagined frustration—avoidance, denial, and scapegoating (Stoetzel 1955). Avoidance includes what Lifton (1967) terms "psychic closing off" or "psychic numbing." 4) Human behavior is typically explained in Japan in terms of forces, biological or environmental, that are uncontrollable by the psyche. Problems regarded as social by Americans may correspondingly be personal problems to the Japanese. In the Japanese view, social problems are institutional, and therefore the primary solution is revolutionary overthrow of the existing government.

The Japanese trait of valuing the group over the individual correlates with a scholarly focus on the study of social problems as ideological issues rather than from the standpoint of the individual. This value is also indicated by an emphasis on particularism, especially by the importance of hierarchical social relationships among individuals. People are more concerned with their relationships with superiors than with equals and inferiors.

These five characteristics of Japanese culture and personality (a lack of

abstract ideals, opportunism, avoidance-scapegoating defenses, explanation of problems in terms of forces external to human beings as social psychological entities, and totalitarianism) are also illustrated in the reactions to college campus disturbances expressed by Japanese intellectuals in articles in the Japanese magazine *Bungei Shunjyu* (Yoshinari 1968; Bungei Shunjyu Editor's Office 1968; Hayashi 1969; Mishima 1969; Fujiwara 1969; Nakaya 1969; and Tachibana 1969). Kentaro Hayashi, a historian who is Dean of the School of Literature at Tokyo University, reacted to his confinement in a schoolroom by radical students for more than a week by castigating not only the students for their irrational and undisciplined behavior but also those who justify the students' rebellion and thereby encourage more unrestrained violence (Hayashi 1969: 102).

Another historian, Kenichi Nakaya (1969), points to a peculiar personality type found in radical students, financial difficulties of some students and professors, and the bureaucratic structure of the university as major factors in the disturbances. Radical students are suspicious, closed-minded, disrespectful of their professors, and self-expressive but unrestrained in attempts to attain their goals, disregarding the rights of other people (p. 149). As reflected in the title of his article, "Why Are Professors Helpless? Their salaries are not enough to let them have a cup of coffee with students," Nakaya considers the lack of contact between professors and students to be a key factor in college disturbances, and he nostalgically recalls the good old days when he had informal contact with his professors over food and drink (p. 152). Nostalgia for the good old days together with the emphasis on the individual's responsibility to adjust at the expense of institutional change are marked in the reactions to college disturbances expressed by other Tokyo University professors, such as Professors Tsutomu Ouchi (1968) and Yoshiyuki Noda (Noda 1968).

Yukio Mishima (1969), an internationally famous novelist, is critical of both professors and students. The professors who champion social change and revolution ideologically and who instigate student movements are at a loss when students actually uprise. After all, thinks Mishima, the professors' "passion for revolution" is just a toy in their fantasies and a gesture for gaining popularity among students. Mishima suspects that about 90% of professors at Tokyo University, who profess radical revolutionary ideology, fit this category (p. 252). They can continue the pose as long as they enjoy their elite status, but when their status is threatened, they suddenly become conservative. According to Mishima, most students are indifferent toward the revolutionary issues and cling to the traditional ideal of *risshin shusse* ("to rise up in the world") and to the egoistic expectation of entering the elite world at graduation. Student radicals are "monkeys," in Mishima's view. He advises the public to let the monkeys have complete freedom within their monkeyland by converting the university into a zoo, where they will

fight among themselves. When the public recognizes their lawlessness, the police should recapture the university for the public. Mishima (p. 254) denounces ideology because it "expels other ideologies by force, and justifies even murder." However, at the same time (p. 259) he accepts nationalism, which is to him "the moving spirit of a people."

An article by Tei Fujiwara (1969), a female social critic, bears a title, "Drop Dead, Caramel Mama," derived from a television scene in which women handed out boxes of caramel candies to students running around armed with helmets and long staves during a campus disturbance. Mrs. Fujiwara explains the unrestrained irresponsibility of radical students as a reaction to their strong dependency needs and stifled individuality, which are produced by the child-rearing practices of middle- and upper-class Japanese mothers. Mrs. Fujiwara supposes that many of Tokyo University's students have been reared by *kyoiku mama* ("education mothers") who compulsively aim to have their sons attend prestigious universities. Boys who are overprotected and overpressured by such mothers remain immature—insensitive to the feelings of others, incapable of listening to the opinions of others, and irresponsible to society. They may also be incapable of controlling themselves in frustration. When they become free of their mother's imposing affection, and when they try to free themselves of their dependency on her, they may react with the most primitive behavior of violence.

Prospects

Japan is a field of conflict between the traditional anti-individual/anti-rationalism complex (Nakamura 1964) and rationalism-empiricism promoted by the push toward technological efficiency necessary for international competition. However, the Japanese have not extended rationalism-empiricism to the study of social problems as much as they have to technological problems. There is some hesitancy among scholars to apply rationalism and humanism to studies of social relations. The emphasis on particularism, especially on hierarchical relationships in an authoritarian society, tends to make professors cautious about departing from tradition and thereby possibly offending superiors (Fischer 1963). This motive may be especially strong in a society such as Japan, where employment is expected to be a life-time commitment—those who change jobs are objects of suspicion—and where appointment to a new position of any persons other than young men newly graduated from college is almost entirely dependent upon personal ties. Another factor that may contribute to the weak scholarly interest in social problems, including student rebellions, is the very size of the vested interests of Japanese professors who enjoy more prestigious and privileged lives than their American counterparts. In an evaluation of the prestige accorded different occupations (Mita 1966: 279), profes-

sors are ranked first, higher than physicians (second), lawyers (sixth), and even governmental cabinet ministers (eighth). Japanese professors also appear to come from more prestigious and privileged families than do American professors. According to a study of a sample of 1,113 students enrolled in 1963 in Tokyo University, the major source of university professors, 87% were from families of "higher" class (*Shukan Asahi*, May 24, 1963). Those who climb the social ladder in attaining professorships adjust easily to the new status and, since education is held in very high esteem, are readily accepted by peers of superior social backgrounds. Thus, it is likely that Japanese professors at prestigious universities often do not know the plight of disadvantaged groups and that they characteristically have little resentment against the Japanese social order.

All of these factors contribute to a lack of interest in a study of social problems among Japanese professors. However, the need for technical efficiency, the breakdown of traditional belief systems which has progressed since the last war, and the increasing emphasis on self-expression among students at educational institutions of all levels will eventually foster the growth of humanistic and rationalistic perspectives, and this in turn will promote increasing interest in the empirical study of social problems.

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NOTES

1. Of 293 B.A. and M.A. theses at 17 colleges and universities in the Osaka-Kyoto area in 1961, 11 dealt with the outcaste problem. All of these were written by students at Ryuukoku University—one of the *Shin* Buddhist universities (Soshioloji 9, 1 [Feb., 1962]: 77-84).

TABLE I

DISTRIBUTION OF ARTICLES ON SOCIAL PROBLEMS BY JAPANESE SOCIOLOGISTS

	Japan. Soc. Review and *Soshioloji* 1962 & 1965	Publications in 1961 and 1963 listed in *JSR**	Total No.	Total %
Total number of articles	92	1,202		
Total: articles on specific social problems	12	76	88	99.9
Individual deviance:				
Crime and delinquency	3	29	32	36.3
Mentally and physically handicapped; alienation	1	8	9	10.2
Drug addiction and alcoholism	0	2	2	2.3
Suicide	1	4	5	5.6
Prostitution	1	0	1	1.1
Normative dissensus:				
Minority relations	0	7	7	8.0
Family Problems	2	8	10	11.3
Old Age problems	0	5	5	5.7
Problems of work and poverty:				
Poverty and slums	3	11	14	16.0
Dominance, clique monopoly, labor problems	1	2	3	3.4
General treatment of social problems		5		
Social welfare		18		

NOTE:* *Japanese Sociological Review,* Vol. 12, 3 (Oct. 1962) and Vol. 15, 4 (March 1965).

TABLE II

PUBLICATIONS ON SPECIFIC SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN JAPAN AND IN THE UNITED STATES

	Japan. Soc. Review (1962 and 1965); *Soshioloji* (1962 and 1965); publications in 1961 and 1963, listed in *JSR* Vols. 13:3 & 15:4		*American Soc. Review* (1962 and 1965); *J. Soc. Problems* (1963 and 1965)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total: publications on specific social problems	88	99.9	56*	100.0
Individual deviance:				
Crime and delinquency	32	36.3	28	50.0
Mentally and physically handicapped; alienation	9	10.2	6	10.7
Drug addiction and alcoholism	2	2.3	0	0.0
Suicide	5	5.6	2	3.5
Prostitution	1	1.1	0	0.0
Normative dissensus:				
Minority problems	7	8.0	7	12.5
Family problems	10	11.3	7	12.5
Old age problems	5	5.7	0	0.0
Problems of work and poverty:				
Poverty and slums	14	16.0	5	8.9
Dominance, clique monopoly, labor problems	3	3.4	1	1.8

NOTE: *This figure does not include articles on international problems (e.g., war), social problems in foreign countries, and methodology of empirical study of social problems. These topics occupy important positions in American publications but not in Japanese.

TABLE III

PUBLICATIONS ON SPECIFIC SOCIAL PROBLEMS FOR 1962 AND 1965

	Japan. Soc. Review	*Soshioloji*	Total	*Am. Soc. Review*
Total number of publications	59	33	92	78
Total: articles on specific social problems	5	7	12 (13.0%)	29* (37.2%)
Individual deviance:				
Crime and delinquency, including gambling	1	2	3	11
Mentally and physically handicapped; alienation	1	0	1	8
Drug addiction and alcoholism	0	0	0	0
Suicide	1	0	1	1
Prostitution	0	1	1	0
Normative dissensus:				
Minority problems	0	0	0	5
Family problems, including old age	0	2	2	3
Problems in work and poverty:				
Poverty and slums	1	2	3	0
Dominance, clique monopoly	1	0	1	1

NOTE:* In addition, the *American Sociological Review* includes two articles on empirical research methods, one on international problems (war), and one on social problems in foreign countries. There is no counterpart for these articles in Japanese journals.

TABLE IV

SOCIOLOGY COURSES OFFERED AT REPRESENTATIVE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE KYOTO-OSAKA AREA IN 1962, 1967, AND 1968

	Number of courses offered	Number of specifically social-problem oriented courses
Soshioloji (Sociology), 9, 3 (June, 1962): 99-102.		
Osaka City University	17	0
Osaka University	15	0
Koonan University	16	0
Kansei Gakuin University	86	1
Kobe Women's College	21	0*
Subtotal	155	1
Soshioloji, 13, 3 (April, 1967): 125-128.		
Kansei Gakuin University	70	0
Ritsumeikan University	48	3†
Subtotal	118	3
Soshioloji, 14, 2 (March, 1968): 130-131.		
Kyoto University	32	1‡
Osaka University	21	0
Subtotal	53	1
TOTAL	326	5

NOTES: **Nooson no shakai fukushi mondai* (Social welfare problems in farming areas).

†Two courses on *shakai mondai* (social problems), one on *shakai byori* (social pathology).

‡*"shakai byori."*

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